

**ACCESS TO OVERSEAS PUBLISHED MONOGRAPHS
IN AUSTRALIA:
INTERLIBRARY LENDING**

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL ROUND
TABLE ON ACCESS TO OVERSEAS MONOGRAPHS THROUGH AUSTRALIAN
LIBRARIES**

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ACCESS TO OVERSEAS MONOGRAPHS IN AUSTRALIA: INTERLIBRARY LENDING

1. Introduction

The National Library of Australia has prepared this paper as part of documentation for the National Round Table on Access to Overseas Monographs in Australian Libraries. Together with other information papers prepared by the Library, the National Academies Forum and the Council of Australian University Librarians, it is intended to facilitate informed discussion of issues at the Round Table, and beforehand among interested librarians and users.

The Round Table agenda includes a session on access to overseas imprint monographs in Australia. In considering ways to improve access by users to this information resource, the Round Table will discuss the role of interlibrary lending in Australia as a crucial mechanism to facilitate access to these monographs.

Information is provided below in two areas:

- statistics produced by the National Library from the Australian Bibliographic Network Inter-Library Loan subsystem (ABN ILL), which carries a significant part of Australia's interlending traffic;
- A summary of the outcomes of an Interlibrary Loan Focus Group convened by the National Library in June to consider issues relating to the interlending of overseas published monographs.

2. Monograph Interlending Trends: Statistical Indicators

Australia has a largely decentralised interlending infrastructure based on voluntary cooperation and reciprocation between libraries. There are two national networks for transmitting requests, ABN ILL and ILANET (administered by the National Library and the State Library of New South Wales respectively) as well as a number of local, regional, state and subject-based networks and consortia. Individual libraries, and branch libraries of a larger institution, may also make special arrangements between themselves. User charges are subsidised by borrowing libraries.

Obtaining reliable evidence of national trends in monograph interlending is therefore difficult. It is even harder to obtain figures on the level of interlending of overseas imprint monographs, including those made to overseas libraries, because libraries rarely keep ILL statistics that distinguish between Australian and overseas imprints.

2.1 Australian Bibliographic Network (ABN) ILL Network

Statistical reports on the volume of document delivery for ABN ILL in recent years provide an indication of recent trends for that system. The National Library generates reports on the request and delivery of both loans (which are assumed to be mostly monographs but can include any original material, such as audio-visual and

microform formats, that are returned after use) and copies retained by the borrower. Copies may include photocopies of journal articles, chapters in books, or of whole pamphlets. These statistics are produced for the purposes of billing and to provide customer libraries with an overview of their system usage.

Tables 1 and 2 on page 8 provide a comparison for ABN ILL of loans as a proportion of total document delivery (which includes both loans and copies supplied) for the period 1993/94 to 1997/98. While ABN ILL statistics have value as the only convenient source of ILL information of this kind, they must be interpreted with caution when drawing wider conclusions on Australian ILL traffic, bearing in mind the following factors:

- Although many medium and large libraries are ABN ILL customers, the network carries only around one quarter to one third of Australian library document delivery requests;
- The number of ABN ILL libraries has increased in the four-year period covered by the statistics, from 252 in July 1993 to 360 in January 1998. The statistics may in part reflect an increase in users, rather than simply an increase in the number of loans and copies;
- The figures for loans include both Australian and overseas imprint monographs.

2.1.1 Document Delivery Volume: Loans and Copies Supplied through ABN ILL and by the National Library

The number of loans supplied through ABN ILL rose by 65% (from 49,241 to 81,127) between 1993/94 and 1997/98. In the same period, the number of copies supplied rose by 58%, a slightly smaller margin (from 99,125 to 156,623).

However, since 1995/96 the number of copies supplied has fallen while the number of loans has continued to rise. This trend reflects, at least in part, a move by libraries away from using ABN ILL to borrow from other libraries towards an increasing reliance on other document delivery services, such as UnCover Australia, and Web-based content sources. Factors behind the steady increase in loan requests could include reduced library acquisition budgets for monographs and changes in library collecting policies.

The number of documents delivered by the National Library from its collections has decreased in recent years, a significant factor being changes to the Library's collecting policy for overseas materials. NLA statistics are nevertheless consistent with the ABN ILL trends for loans and copies outlined above. While the NLA had a 15% drop in document supply (loans and copies) between 1996/97 and 1997/98, the proportionate decrease in copies (18%) was much greater than loans (5%) which was also the case in the preceding financial year. This supports the observation from ABN ILL statistics that monograph lending is of continuing importance.

2.1.2 Document delivery performance: turnaround times for supply of requested material

ABN ILL also produces statistical reports on the turnaround time for completion of borrowing requests made through the network. These reports include the number of calendar days between when a request is made and when the item is received by the requesting library.

These figures must be interpreted with caution, as their accuracy is dependent on whether libraries choose to enter this information on the system immediately or at a later date (eg in batches). However, since 1993 the average turnaround time for loans, which includes delivery time by the postal service (usually 4 –5 days), has been consistent at 14 to 15 calendar days. This is comparable with the performance of North American college and research libraries, where a recent Association of Research Libraries (ARL) performance measures study for ILL/document delivery¹ reported an average borrowing turnaround time of 15.6 calendar days for research libraries and 10.8 days for college libraries.

While the average ABN ILL turnaround time for all borrowing transactions is around two weeks, many transactions are completed more quickly than this. In every year since 1993, at least a third of all transactions have been completed within 8 days (in 1997 the figure was almost 40%). There has therefore been a consistent performance by ABN ILL libraries in supplying loans in recent years. *Table 3* on page 9 gives details of the turnaround period in which most ABN ILL transactions occur (in calendar days) using 1997 as a recent illustration.

3. Improving Access to Overseas Imprint Monographs: Interlending Issues

As part of its preparation for the Round Table, in June 1998 the National Library convened a focus group of Australian ILL librarians. The group was representative of a range of Australian libraries with significant ILL activity including university, state and special libraries. Participants were Charu Sood (National Library), Lionel Robson (University of New South Wales), Susan Magnay (State Library of New South Wales), Chris Taylor (University of Queensland), Tony Nicholson (Flinders University), and Julie Marshall (La Trobe University).

The purpose of the Focus Group was to obtain the perspective of Australian libraries that service a significant number of ILL requests, either as borrowers or lenders of monographs. Members were asked to identify key issues relating to *user* (as distinct from *library*) access to monographs published overseas, including both titles held by Australian libraries and those not held in Australia.

A recent development in international interlibrary loan not specifically addressed by the Focus Group is an International ILL Task Force of the Research Libraries Group, a US-based international consortium of research libraries of which the National

¹ Association of Research Libraries. *Interlibrary loan and Document Delivery Performance Measures Study. Executive Summary*, March 1998. Reproduced at <http://www.arl.org/access/illdd/execsum.shtml>

Library of Australia is a member. The task force has shown strong support for international lending and is working to overcome practical barriers such as shipping costs, security concerns and currency differences.

3.1 Summary of Outcomes and Recommendations

3.1.1 The present picture in interlending of overseas imprint monographs

1. Participants agreed that the existing Australian interlending system was satisfactory (ranked 3 on a scale of 5) in meeting user requests for non-Australian monograph imprints.
2. Discussion revealed that in the experience of participants:
 - The overall proportion of monograph loans to supply of copies of articles has remained small;
 - There has in general not been a significant rise in the borrowing of overseas imprint monographs in recent years;
 - Loan requests are usually satisfied from Australian sources where possible in preference to overseas;
 - Obtaining non-Australian imprint monographs from overseas libraries is not a significant problem for requesting Australian libraries. Many university ILL librarians have developed special relationships with their counterparts in overseas libraries and source materials from them. Interlibrary loans have been supplied by a range of libraries in North America, Europe and Asia as well as by the British Library Document Supply Centre. Australian libraries are becoming better at requesting loans from overseas, perhaps in response to a decline in availability of resources in Australian collections;
 - The devaluation of the Australian dollar will affect the ability of libraries to subsidise ILL costs.

3.1.2 Key issues

- *Access to reliable information about holdings is crucial.* The National Bibliographic Database (NBD) remains the principal source of this information in Australia. Impediments to successful ILL requests arise when reliable bibliographic and holdings information is not available on the NBD.
- Australian libraries tend to operate individually in making interlibrary loan arrangements with lenders. *Information about the reliability of lenders (both in Australia and overseas) and their willingness to satisfy requests is not available as a shared resource.* If this kind of information is more readily available, overseas libraries must be used judiciously so as to preserve goodwill.
- *The existing ACLIS ILL code includes a recommended cost, but does not adequately address performance standards for all service levels.* A revised code that encompasses quality standards for ILL such as timeliness, reliability and ease of use for users would enhance the Australian ILL system to the benefit of users. The development of performance standards was an agreed outcome (Action B) of the 1995 National Interlending and Document Delivery Summit but this has not eventuated.

- The efficient supply of interlibrary loans and document supply requests requires staff who are properly trained for increasingly complex work. *ILL/document supply units sometimes lack an adequate number of staff with appropriate knowledge and skill* – perhaps a carryover from the time when this work was simpler and more clerical in nature.
- *The growth of distance education in Australia has ramifications for the Australian ILL system* because of the nature of distance education users and their needs. Libraries of institutions offering distance education need to meet increased interlending demand within tight budgets. Distance education users now use public libraries more often to obtain in-depth information. The level of ILL service provided to distance education users varies considerably.

3.1.3 Broad recommendations

A Identifying and locating items for interlibrary loan through the National Bibliographic Database

1. (a) The contribution of more holdings information by libraries, in particular specialised libraries and institutions, to the NBD should be strongly encouraged;
- (b) Contributing libraries should ensure that the holdings information on the NBD is accurate for their collections;
- (c) Where appropriate, contributors should improve the accuracy of bibliographic information in the NBD to which these holdings are linked.

B Improving co-operative mechanisms

2. The exchange of information on sources of supply for non-Australian monograph imprints should be facilitated, bearing in mind that overseas libraries should be used judiciously and using proper procedures so as to preserve goodwill;
3. (a) Libraries with a significant ongoing commitment to collection development in particular subject areas should be encouraged to accept the role of national lenders in those areas, and
- (b) A funding proposal for enhancing cooperative interlending mechanisms should be made to government to compensate libraries who accept this kind of national role.

C Improving user convenience

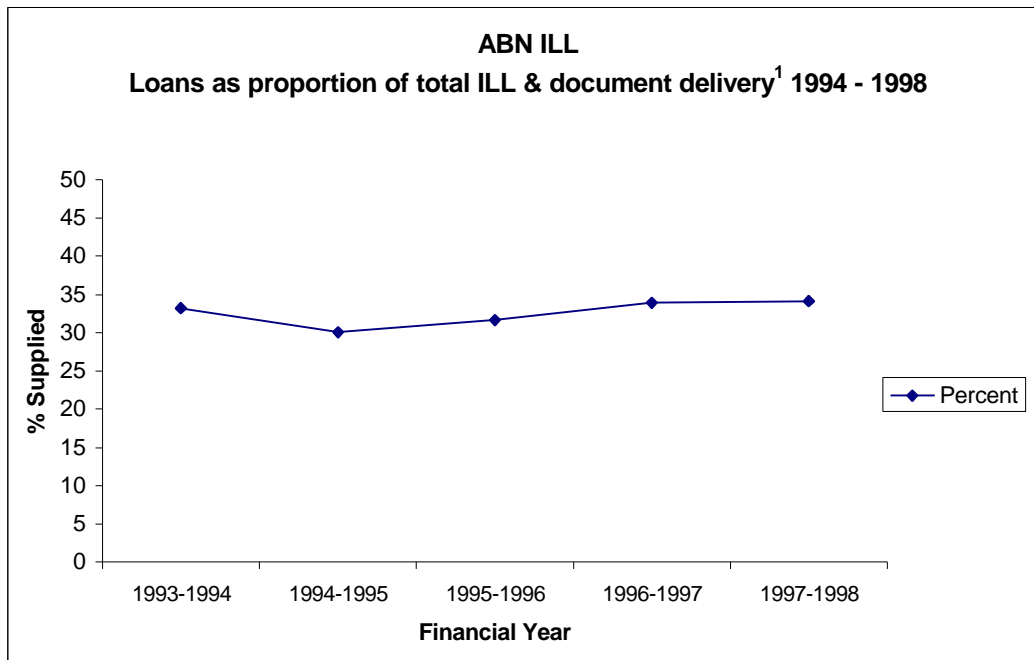
4. Libraries should consider the feasibility of patron-initiated access to their interlending request systems.

D Standards for quality ILL service delivery

5. It is desirable to develop performance standards for the basic level of ILL service;
6. A list of Australian libraries meeting recommended standards of interlending delivery should be published, together with a list of those libraries that do not meet such standards.

E Strengthening the skills of ILL staff

7. Library managers should assess the skill and resource levels required for ILL staff to provide a high standard of interlibrary lending in Australian libraries.

TABLE 1

¹ Total delivery = loans + copies

TABLE 2

ABN ILL
LOANS AS PROPORTION OF TOTAL ILL & DOCUMENT DELIVERY
1993 - 1998

Year	Loans Supplied	Copies Supplied	Total Copies and Loans supplied	Loans supplied as Percentage of Total
1993/94	49241	99125	148366	33.18
1994/95	66837	155288	222125	30.09
1995/96	76420	165249	241669	31.62
1996/97	81868	159463	241331	33.92
1997/98	81127	156623	237750	34.12

TABLE 3

